

## **CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **Minutes of a meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 9 October 2025 at 6.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Third Floor, Southwater One, Telford, TF3 4JG**

**Present:** Councillors L Parker (Chair), E Aston, A S Jhawar, J Kaur, I Preece, K Tonks and J Urey.

**In Attendance:** D Knibbs (Director: Children's Safeguarding & Family Support), D Thomas-White (Lead Lawyer: Children and Adults) and S Wellman (Director: Education & Skills)

**Apologies for Absence:** Councillors C Chikandamina

#### **CYP6      Declarations of Interest**

None.

#### **CYP7      Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

**RESOLVED – that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 10 July 2025 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.**

#### **CYP8      Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill**

The Director: Children's Services presented an overview of the Children's Wellbeing and School Bill, a major legislative proposal aimed at reforming children's social care and education. The Bill built upon a series of national reviews and strategic publications, including the Independent Review of Children's Social Care (2022), the CMA's review into placements, and the government's Stable Homes, Built on Love strategy (2023). These developments, alongside the Kinship Strategy, Working Together 2023, and the National Framework for Children's Social Care, had laid the foundation for a more integrated, family-first approach.

Members were informed that the Families First Partnership Programme, launched earlier in the year, supported this direction and aligned with the government's publication Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive (November 2024), which set expectations for the 2025/26 transformation year. There were three key enablers underpinning the Bill: prioritising effective multi-agency working, ensuring leadership drove good practice, and building a skilled and supported workforce. The Committee were advised that these enablers aimed to deliver the four core outcomes of keeping families together with the right support, strengthening family networks, providing stable, loving homes for children in care and care leaver and ensuring that the Council were well placed to deliver these outcomes through cross-directorate and external partnership working.

The Director: Children's Services highlighted several reforms within social care, including the introduction of a more integrated Family Help model, combining early help, Child in Need, and Child Protection services. Locally, this involved developing "team around the family" approaches, bringing together family support workers and social workers. Members heard that Family Group decision making was to become mandatory prior to care proceedings, with the Council adopting a "Circles of Support" model to ensure needs were met. Multi-agency safeguarding teams were to be established to identify harm quickly and build family resilience. Enhanced support for care leavers was to be provided through the Staying Close initiative, alongside improved training and support for the workforce and kinship carers.

The Committee heard that structural reforms proposed in the bill had included the regulation of agency worker use, improved quality and accountability in children's homes, the creation of Regional Care Cooperatives, and financial oversight measures including a proposed profit cap on care providers.

The Director: Education & Skills outlined that the Children's Wellbeing and School Bill introduced practical measures such as breakfast clubs, reduced costs for school uniforms, and provisions for home-schooled children. It also outlined that academies would be required to adhere to the national curriculum and teacher conditions. Members were informed that there were new duties for local authorities relating to admissions and planning, which aimed to ensure fairness between local authority schools and academies. Members heard that the bill was expected to strengthen safeguarding through education by introducing a unique child identifier and extending the duties of virtual heads to all children with a social worker or in kinship care. The Director: Education & Skills noted that whilst the bill did not prescribe the future of academisation, it shifted the focus toward school improvement, regardless of structure. The Committee were asked to note that statutory induction programmes and national terms and conditions will apply to teachers, including those in academies. The Bill also allows for the opening of non-academy schools moving forward.

Members were advised that governance arrangements were currently being finalised, with many elements of the Bill already in pilot phases. Ongoing briefings were being held with staff and partners, and the Council was co-producing its response through workshops and think tanks. The transformation journey was expected to begin in April 2025.

During discussion, Members emphasised the importance of the Holiday Activities and Food programme, noting its vital role in supporting families during school holidays alongside increasing levels of demand. The Committee was informed that funding for the programme had been secured for a further three years.

Members raised concerns regarding gaps in mental health provision and the impact of increasing waiting lists. The Director: Education & Skills advised that emotional wellbeing was not addressed within the Bill but would be considered in a forthcoming paper. It was reported that current provision

included mental health teams and mentors working within schools, with ongoing work to align resources to strengthen preventative support. The Committee also heard that recent scrutiny work had highlighted the need for collaborative approaches in response to national consultations, and that a joint workshop on this topic was planned. The Director: Children's Safeguarding and Family Support highlighted the role of Family Hubs in delivering therapeutic support and early intervention, including assistance linked to parental mental health and noted that local priorities continued to focus on the development of community-based, multi-agency teams, with an emphasis on improving parental wellbeing.

Members suggested that Youth Mental Health First Aid be incorporated into staff training within schools. Officers confirmed that such training was available at no cost to schools through existing partnership arrangements and undertook to provide further information regarding staff uptake.

The Committee was assured that the Council's response to the Bill was being developed through extensive engagement with the workforce, young people and parents over the previous year, ensuring that reforms were shaped around local needs.

Members thanked officers for the comprehensive update and acknowledged both the ambition and the scale of the proposed reforms. The Committee noted that further updates would be provided as the transformation programme continued to progress.

#### **CYP9      Youth Offer**

The Director: Education & Skills presented an update to the Committee on the development of Telford and Wrekin's Youth Offer and Strategy, outlining the statutory responsibilities under Section 507B of the Education Act 1996. This duty required local authorities to secure, as far as reasonably practicable, sufficient educational and recreational leisure-time activities for young people, and to ensure that young people's voices shaped the offer.

Members were informed that the local definition of 'youth' within the strategy referred to young people aged 10–19, and up to 25 for those with SEND or additional needs, going beyond the national framework which typically focused on ages 13–19. It was emphasised that the review did not suggest a lack of provision, but rather sought to create a coherent and sustainable framework that brought together all youth services under one umbrella. The aim was to align partners, ensure quality, identify funding streams, and address gaps in provision. Members heard that the strategy also linked into the Children and Young People's Strategy 2025–2028 and initiatives such as 5 by 5 and 10 by 10.

The Committee heard that the strategy had been shaped by national guidance, including the nine essential elements of youth work set out by the National Youth Agency. The Service Delivery Manager: Achievement & Enrichment explained that significant preparatory work had taken place,

including the completion of a Local Needs Assessment to identify gaps in provision and priority groups, extensive engagement with young people through forums, schools and home education networks, and collaboration with the voluntary, community and faith sector to map existing services and understand current strengths and challenges. Officers reported that workforce planning had been undertaken to distinguish between youth activities and youth work-led delivery, and that a Youth Work Curriculum had been developed drawing on national models. Safeguarding had also been embedded throughout the strategy, and monitoring and evaluation tools were being implemented to ensure impact and accountability.

Members were asked to note that young people had consistently highlighted the need for trusted adults, accessible mental health support, safe and welcoming spaces, opportunities to share their views and receive feedback on actions taken, and a broader range of activities, particularly in areas with limited provision. Professionals contributing to the consultation had emphasised the importance of strengthening youth voice, expanding emotional wellbeing support, developing a skilled workforce, securing long-term funding and improving the consistency and accessibility of services. From the consultation, four priority themes had emerged, reflecting the need for young people to play a meaningful role in shaping decisions; the importance of providing high-quality, safe and accessible youth clubs and activities; the need for enhanced support around stress, anxiety and emotional wellbeing; and the importance of ensuring that young people feel safe within their communities.

The proposed Youth Offer had been structured around a three-tier model, beginning with universal youth activities such as urban games, delivered by a range of providers and supported through improved signposting. The second tier focused on targeted youth clubs for priority groups delivered through a new commissioned model, while the third tier consisted of specialist youth support delivered through Family Hubs and partner organisations, including mentoring and more intensive interventions. The Service Delivery Manager: Achievement & Enrichment explained that the model was designed to be targeted to local needs, sustainable through multi-year commissioning, underpinned by quality assurance and safeguarding measures, and flexible in response to ongoing feedback. Progress to date included the re-establishment of the Youth Partnership to bring together providers and commissioners, the appointment of a Youth Development Officer who had led engagement work, the launch of a Youth Provider Network to strengthen collaboration, identification of the need for a digital platform to support the Youth Offer, and the piloting of quality assurance tools to improve safeguarding and service standards. Benchmarking activity had taken place with other authorities, including a peer review process.

The Committee noted the proposed implementation timeline, which included publication of the Youth Strategy in autumn 2025, the development and finalisation of a commissioning framework in winter 2025, engagement with providers and contract awards in spring 2026, and the launch of the commissioned Youth Offer in summer 2026. The Service Delivery Manager:

Achievement & Enrichment highlighted that the consultation remained ongoing with young people, providers, schools and communities, alongside work to develop a governance structure to support accountability and long-term delivery.

During discussion, Members commended the progress made and recognised the importance of a comprehensive and inclusive youth offer, particularly for children who may otherwise have limited access to services. Concerns were raised regarding the affordability of activities for families and the suitability of provision during school holidays when parents were working. Officers acknowledged these issues and highlighted the availability of free and low-cost activities supported through a range of funding streams, while noting that wrap-around childcare provision had increased and that further work was taking place to strengthen the holiday offer. Members also acknowledged the wider challenges posed by childcare costs at a national level and welcomed the progress made locally in expanding provision.

The Committee noted the strong offers already in place within some town and parish areas and expressed support for the proposed commissioned model. Members were encouraged to continue working with officers to identify local gaps in provision. Members thanked officers for the detailed update and reaffirmed its commitment to supporting the development and delivery of the Youth Offer.

### **CYP10 Work Programme**

The Lead Lawyer: Children and Adults informed Members the Committee operated on a two-year work programme, which had been updated since it was last reviewed by the Committee.

Members noted the update.

### **CYP11 Chair's Update**

The Chair informed Members that a joint working group with the Health Scrutiny Committee was currently in the process of being arranged, and would consider mental health provision across the Borough.

The meeting ended at 6.53 pm

**Chairman:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** Thursday 5 February 2026